

POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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which they abound. Very rarely does a ruler, a statesman or a soldier admit an error or confess his insufficiency for his task. Yet though their aim is identical, the apologies differ enormously in literary skill and power to convince. A writer can omit or distort facts, and only the expert can catch him out; but he cannot wholly conceal his own character. The only crowned head to enter the witness-box is William n. The drab colours of his Memoirs present a strange contrast to the bright hues of his letters and telegrams, his speeches and marginal annotations. There is no suggestion that he ever made a mistake, and we are assured that he protested against the worst blunders of his counsellors, which as a constitutional ruler he was unable to prevent. This is a very different story from the proud claim of earlier years that policy was decided entirely by himself. It is true enough that he disliked the Moroccan adventures of Billow and Kiderien ; but he was directly responsible for the still greater blunder of the *Flatten-politlk* which, as Count Metterriich pointed out from the German Embassy in London, was bound to estrange England and to drive her into the Franco-Russian camp. His plea that he was innocent of the Kruger telegram is disproved by the evidence of the discussions as subsequently revealed. He writes with dignity about Bismarck and with gratitude of Gavrivi and Hohenlohe, but the chapters on Billow and Bethmann are filled with criticism. The former's handling of the *Daily Telegraph* crisis, he declares, destroyed his confidence, and Bethmann was too much of a schoolmaster. The Haldane Mission is dismissed as a political manoeuvre, and the wisdom no less than the energy of Tirpitz is warmly extolled. The author stoutly denies that he or his Ministers,

his soldiers or his people, desired war. He portrays Germany as a profoundly pacific state, wantonly attacked by the Triple Entente—a thesis as unconvincing as the rival legend that Germany was the only wolf in the sheepfold. A more agreeable impression is derived from his second book, *Early Life*. The Memoirs of the Crown Prince, skilfully edited by Karl Rosner, cover part of the same ground. Friction between the ruler and his heir, he frankly confesses, was a Hohenzollern tradition; but he pays homage to his fathers' idealism, high character and devotion to peace.

The three principal advisers of William II during the critical years of his reign, Bismarck, Bethmann and Tirpitz, have told their story at length. The fourth Chancellor fell from power